

News Release

For Immediate Release

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NO MALATHION FOUND IN MS CATFISH: TESTING TO CONTINUE, EXPAND BY YEAR'S END

Officials with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) say that results from tests of catfish and catfish ponds earlier this month turned up no evidence of the chemical malathion. "This is good news for the consumer as well as the catfish industry in Mississippi," said Lester Spell Jr., Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce. "It shows that Mississippi, which supplies almost three-quarters of the world's commercial catfish, is providing a safe, nutritious commodity."

In state tests, nearly 100 catfish were analyzed at the state chemical laboratory in Starkville. The fish were collected July 30 and 31. The U.S. Department of Agriculture ordered the tests after reports that farmers were using the pesticide malathion to kill off sunfish and other unwanted fish in catfish ponds. Federal law prohibits the intentional use of malathion in water, because of its toxicity to certain fish and other aquatic life. Legally, the chemical is used for such things as boll weevil and mosquito control.

Even though the tests turned up no evidence of the chemical, MDAC officials say testing will continue. "The investigation into the presence of malathion in catfish is still ongoing," says Dr. Robert McCarty, Director of the Bureau of Plant Industry, a division of MDAC. "Monitoring for the presence of malathion in catfish will be conducted through August and continue until the end of October to insure that catfish do not contain residues of this chemical prior to entering the market."

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McCarty also said that the department plans to expand testing catfish in the near future. “While we are concentrating our efforts on malathion, the department is working with the catfish industry to develop a long-range ongoing monitoring program to detect chemicals in catfish,” said McCarty. “This long-range monitoring program should be finalized by November 1998 and be fully implemented by January 1999.”